

I wanted to start off by making a few observations about video in America, but I think we should have a little background first. I want to cite a few statistics from Nicholas Johnson's How to Talk Back to a Television Set. Commercial television determines, especially in America, our image of reality. Nicholas Johnson says that by the time a child reaches the age of ten, the child has spent more time watching television than he or she's spent in school and with his/her parents combined. In some respects, television influences the child to a much greater extent than school and parents together. In addition, somewhere between 90 percent and 99 percent of all American homes have a television set, and that set is turned on an average of 5-1/2 hours a day. So the medium's impact on our image of reality is immense.

Until now, explorations of video in other than commercial applications have been concerned primarily with determining the nature and inherent characteristics of the medium. These efforts I have grouped into three basic areas. One area is video as art. This includes tapes and environments and sculptures, growing out of the traditions of painting and sculpture but also ^{of} film, performance, dance, and theater--a kind of synthesis of all the ^{expressive forms} [^]. I think the emphasis on the exploration of the nature of the medium comes at least partly out of the modernist tradition of painting. Another category is video as a tool of social, political, or psychological change--change emphasizing process or transmutation. (It's appropriate that we're in a building that is holding a DuChamp exhibition. In all his work, DuChamp was concerned with transmutation of one sort of another.) Video was used, for example, by the Top Value TV people to make a tape of the Republican National Convention, an alternative to commercial TV coverage that made use of portable technology--a totally different attitude. A third category active in America is video as documentary, mainly of minority points of view that are not normally represented on television. We're all aware that commercial television represents a very particular white-upper-middle-class-sexist-male-dominated-capitalist-consumer kind of

attitude. And that it's anti-Women's Lib and it's anti-gay and it's anti many other minority groups. Video's been used very effectively by a number of these groups. Of course these three categories overlap in some works, but I think these are the basic areas in which people are working in video outside commercial television. To some extent, there has been a lack of communication between the various basic categories.

I think America's probably taken a leading role in the exploration of the medium. There's been a huge amount of production, but the museums have been rather reluctant generally to become involved in video. I'd like to speak a little about the role of the museum, the relation between the museum and the viewing of video tapes, because I think the nature of the medium affects the conditions under which video works are best experienced. I would say that video works--tapes especially--are best experienced in the home. There are several reasons for this. I think a tape is best seen when you can replay it as often as you want to, can stop and rewind and review a segment, when you can play it anytime, before you fall asleep or first thing when you get up in the morning, when you can do this without interruption, away from the sanctimonious ambiance of our great temples of culture. The importance of being able to replay is just simple, basic communications theory. It's a two-way communication between you and the tape; you have some control over the viewing of it. Another reason that the home is the best place to see video is that there's an intimacy involved in video not involved in any other art medium. There's an intimacy between you and your TV set, in sickness and in health, till death do you part, a kind of romantic fantasy. You lie there in bed watching the late movie or something, and it's your umbilical cord to the rest of the world. It gives you all the information you need. It's like a member of your family .

Video space is different from film, from dance performance, theater, painting, drawing, because video time is extraordinarily different than time in any other medium. There's just no comparison, no parallel, with film. I think,

of course, there are video works, either environment or sculpture, that require more precisely determined conditions for viewing, which are best seen in more controlled spaces, for example, Nauman's "Video Corridor" or Peter Campus's "Interface." I saw Nauman's "Video Corridor" at the Whitney when there was a long line waiting to see it, and I saw it again in Count Panza's collection in a quiet kind of vacuum outside of Milan, and the kind of space in which it was experienced was extremely important in the experience of it as a work of art. But tapes, I think, are best seen at home.

Then you get into another problem: if you want to be able to replay tapes, and you want to build a library of them, how do you afford them? A ten-minute tape by Sonnier costs \$175. I'd like to talk a little bit about money, and its influence on the video situation. I'd like to read you something from an unpublished conversation I had with Bob Smithson in April of '72, just before the "Documenta" exhibition. This is Bob Smithson speaking. "So this abstraction--so art, especially painting, becomes super-currency for privileged groups: an artist can't give his work to a museum and get a tax write-off, but a collector can. And this is just another way of controlling the artist, as a class. The most class-determined artists are the ones who claim they aren't a class, and they are. I know of instances where collectors have given or attempted to give a work of art, which they've in some way ripped off an artist, to a museum in order to become part of a trusteeship. So they get an in to a sort of cultural control, and the artist is just a hapless producer who's constantly making these things for their privileged value. That's why I say the artist is alienated from the value of his work. Someone else is determining his value for him. This artists take for granted. Their compensation is that they're spiritual, they're pure, they're mad--you know, any number of mythologies. In fact, there's a category of personal mythologies at "Documenta." Personal mythologies strike me as another dream world. That's their compensation. Aesthetics too is very close to a kind of spiritualism, so the emphasis on esthetics tends to mitigate the social relationships so that you just see esthetic things

in themselves." And then later he says, "I'm not saying down with money or anything like that. I'm saying let's understand an alternative value system where actually artists might be more in control of their own values." ¶ The trouble is that most collectors and dealers will play on the artist's guilt in regard to "filthy lucre," which they reinforce.

the artists, Frustrated by their own guilt about economic considerations, retreat to purity and spiritualism and esotericism and hermeticism, abstraction,

idealism--all those imponderables. Metaphysics.

There's just a great storehouse, as I call it, at the end of this junkyard, metaphysics, constantly dispensing purity, ideals, spiritualism. Sounds a lot like Bob Smithson, doesn't it?

I know so many artists who are doing fantastic video work who just don't have the money to do it.

Equipment is enormously expensive; even renting equipment or studio time costs a lot of money. economically feasible, The only ways to work

are ⁱⁿ centers, like the Experimental Television Center in Binghamton, WGBH and in schools, or through grants. But grants are generally given to groups, not individuals, and it's very hard to form a nonprofit organization now. The money situation is complicated by a lack of sales, as well. One reason museums haven't bought video is that museums haven't generally considered video as serious art. It's like home movies or something, you know, not really serious art, because it doesn't fit within the context of, for example, modernist painting. It requires that you sit for a time and watch something carefully. You can't take it in at a glance, overall, and then contemplate it more thoroughly later. And so museums are reluctant to buy video works. I think that that might be a legitimate problem. Also, the prices are just too high for an individual to accumulate a collection. I'd like to see video tapes being sold at reasonable prices in bookstores and record stores, so you could collect them like books or records. But so far, marketing has been mainly directed toward the same elitist crowd that normally tends to go to galleries.

Some tapes, and some environments, are universally enjoyed, and can be shown very easily on commercial television. For example--I don't know how Peter's going to like this but--everybody loves Peter Campus's work, right? It can be enjoyed on so many different levels that everybody loves it. I showed it to a group of college students who had no art background at all, and they just freaked out, they loved it. Other examples are Wegman's tapes, or Nauman's "Corridor." But Lynda Benglis's work, for example, I think is not enjoyable on as many different levels and requires a more special audience.

The best place to see video is in the home, but for now, I think, the most important steps to take are (1) to organize at least one travelling show for New York City, a critic's choice of the best video work being made, accompanied by a clearly articulated account of the critics' criteria for making the selection. I think this should be the first of many such shows, organized through many points of view, because what's most lacking in New York is not quantity of work, but criteria, or a critical framework, to make the works more accessible. And (2) I think we need a touring exhibition of a selection of international video tapes, to tour Europe, Asia, and South America, to acquaint other artists with what has been done in the medium, because what's lacking in foreign countries is--from my limited recent travel--general knowledge of what others have done in the medium. And finally, effort must be made to gain air time, time on commercial television. I think this conference is a very important first step, but a gentleman who's very influential in the Museum of Modern Art, William S. Paley, is also very influential in one of the largest communication networks in the world, CBS Television, and I'd like to say that I appreciate very much this ten minutes and \$100, but it's not enough. What I want is an hour a week on CBS network TV.

I'd like to read you a closing statement from this Smithsonian interview. I said ^{that} William S. Paley controls a communication network capable of affecting the entire world. Rather than using it in ways which might affect receptivity to creative ways of thinking and doing, it's used to enforce patterns of the grossest kind of exploitation. ^{Though} the Modern

a few years ago put on several patronizing exhibitions with the idea of attracting other than the usual kind of elitist crowd (no doubt with the supplementary motive of higher gate receipts to balance the flagging budget), these actions didn't have much to do with a real concern for art. Bob Smithson's response was, "That's just it, because the Museum functions as a bank. There's a heavy investment in there, and they don't want anything to threaten that." In other words, we'll just reinforce our Picassos. Paley isn't going to be interested in an alternative art situation that would call into question the very validity of the whole museum as well as the underpinnings of commercial television institution, Well, I think that the nature of the video nevertheless, medium is going to bring about major changes in the relationship between the artist and the institutions through which the artist's work is normally threaded. And promoting those changes is the biggest job that we have ahead of us, working in video.

Edward Lucie-Smith

Americans are accustomed, just as we are in England, to a continuing close relationship between avant-garde artists in our two countries. Since the late 50's, art movements in Britain and in the United States have gone hand in hand, and have shown a greater degree of unanimity, for example, than has existed between art in Britain and art in France. Why, then, has the video phenomenon been slow to take root in Britain? The reasons are perhaps more complex than has usually been supposed.

Perhaps the first point to tackle is the question of equipment. Portable, easy-to-use equipment has been slow in reaching the British market and expensive when it got there. Given the difference in living standards between Britain and America, the expense has had particular impact. This has meant that few artists could aspire to buy even the most rudimentary kind of set-up. Instead, they have had to rely on rented or borrowed equipment, often in unsatisfactory condition, or on the facilities grudgingly offered to them by various institutions. In addition, problems of compatibility have been acute.

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THE NEW
TELEVISION:
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